

Hello, My name is Lori Hylinski and I attend Northwestern Connecticut Community College majoring in Human Services. I commute to Winsted from Oxford, CT. You might have noticed that I am deaf.

People think deafness makes it hard to speak, to watch TV, to use the phone or to make friendships with people. I have overcome most of that. Deafness' real difficulty is in getting an education and in getting a job.

Everything a deaf person learns has to be told straight to them. We don't "pick things up" while driving to work and listening to the radio. We can't read a book in the student lounge and "overhear" a class mate explaining the answer we are hunting for. We can not "sound out" a word and say, "Oh... I know that word". How a word is spelled doesn't help a deaf person remember the word if they use sign language. Every written word is learned and memorized.

We are intelligent, but not "hearing" things around us can leave us with gaps in our education. These gaps can hurt us as we work for college degrees. NCCC has the Collegiate Education for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Program which is a full support program for Deaf and Hard-of-hearing students. A few years ago, the program had 5 full time interpreter/tutors. A few years back 3 of them retired, but only one was replaced. This has created a CRISIS for the Deaf students. We have part time interpreters for some classes, but the tutoring after class was our way to fill in the gaps that we haven't picked up in life like you and other hearing people have. Using the regular tutor center is first come- first served. Those tutors can't sign. We have to submit a interpreter request form two days in advance to get an interpreter. This is fine for an appointment, but like I said, tutoring is first come-first served. Also, they have no knowledge of how a Deaf person learns so it is not the best way to overcome our gaps.

Getting a job as a Deaf person is very hard. The employer sees us and thinks, "How am I going to communicate with this deaf person?" "How will this deaf person learn the work?" A college degree can get us in the door. The boss can feel better because we have been successful in college. I have a job right now, BUT I can't keep it unless I get a degree. Trying to sign up for classes is hard. I commute an hour to school. Classes fill up and close, or the class isn't offered every semester. I have to schedule in tutoring and I work full time on the weekends. Please don't cut the budget. The budget cuts the past few years has made the hope of graduating harder and harder and moved it farther into the future. I am worried that more cuts will make graduating impossible for me. I want to keep my job. It is work I love, but if I can't get classes and graduate, I might not be able to keep it.

Thank you for your time.